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Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-25 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 ACDA-19

OMB-01 AID-20 NIC-01 DRC-01 /166 W
---------- 079228
O R 150954Z AUG 74
FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7320
USIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY MONROVIA
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
USLO PEKING
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASY SAIGON
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY TOKYO
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON
USSAG NAKHON PHAMOM
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TAGS: CB, PFOR, MCAP

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SUBJ: KHMER ARMED FORCES -- ONE YEARAFTER U.S. BOMBING HALT.

1. SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE IS A BRIEF APPRAISAL OF THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF THE THREE ARMS OF THE FANK, THE KHMER REPUBLIC'S ARMED FORCES: THE ARMY, NAVY, AND ABOVE ALL THE KHMER AIR FORCE. THEIR PERFORMANCE SINCE THE U.S. BOMBING HALT ONE YEAR AGO HAS CERTAINLY NOT BORNE OUT THE DIRE PREDICTIONS MADE BY OBSERVERS AT THAT TIME. THE EMBASSY HOPES THIS ACCOUNT MAY BE USEFUL IN DISCUSSIONS WITH FRIENDLY GOVERNMENTS ON THE EVE OF FORTH-COMING UNGA CONSIDERATION OF THE KHMER CREDENTIALS ISSUE. THE DEPARTMENT MAY WISH TO REPEAT THIS MESSAGE TO OTHER POSTS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON AUGUST 15, 1974, U.S. AIR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN BOMBING MISSIONS OVER THE KHMER REPUBLIC CAME TO A HALT. PHNOM PENH PENH WAS PERVADED BY AN ATMOSPHERE OF GLOOM. JOURNALISTS FLOCKED IN, AMID PREDICTIONS OF IMMINENT COLLAPSE OF THE GKR AND ITS MILITARY EFFORT, SEEKING EYE-WITNESS ACCOUNTS OF THE CITY'S FALL (TO BE FILED JUST AFTER THEY HAD CAUGHT THE LAST PLANE OUT). THE FANK (FORCES ARMEE NATIONALS KHMERES) WERE EXHAUSTED AND DISCOURAGED AFTER THREE YEARS OF SPORADIC BUT CUMU-LATING ENEMY SUCCESSES THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY, WITH FRIENDLY FORCES COOPED UP IN A NUMBER OF SHRINKING ENCLAVES, MANY ENTIRELY DEPENDENT UPON AERIAL RESUPPLY WHICH HAD MAINLY BEEN AFFECTED BY U. S. AVIATION. THE FLEDGLING KAF (KHMER AIR FORCE) WAS UNDERMANNED, UNDER-EQUIPPED, LARGELY UNTRIED. THE CAPITAL CITY WAS SURROUNDED, ALMOST ENTIRELY DEPENDENT UPON TENUOUS RIVER CONVOYS FOR THE SUPPLY OF FOODSTUFFS, PERTROLEUM PRODUCTS AND OTHER ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES.

3. ON AUGUST 15, 1974, A MUCH MORE CONFIDENT FANK CELE-BRATED THE PARADE AND "ARMED FORCES DAY" CEREMONY IN PHNOM PENH, WHILE SMALLER NUMBERS OF JOURNALISTS ARRIVED TO WRITE THEIR "ONE YEAR AFTER" STORIES. THE MOOD OF THE FANK HAD IMPROVED CONSIDERABLE IN THE INTERVENING TWELVE-MONTH PERIOD, WHICH SAW STEADY PROGRESS IN THE PERFORMANCE OF ALL THREE MILITARY SERVICES -- TESTED HERE
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AND THERE BY MAJOR ENEMY EFFORTS, EVEN WHILE SUFFERING SETBACKS, ESPECIALLY IN THE EARLIER PART OF THAT YEAR, BUT NEVERTHELESS MARKED BY A SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN THE COMBAT AND RESUPPLY EFFICIENCY OF THE KAF. AND WHILE THE CIVILIAN POPULATION WAS SHOWING AN UNDERSTAND-ABLE DEGREE OF WAR-WEARINESS, IN SOME SECTORS BORDERING ON APATHY, THERE IS DEMONSTRATED REASON FOR CONFIDENCE IN THE COMBAT CAPABILITY OF THE FANK.

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4. THE KHMER COMMUNISTS (KC) COULD LOOK BACK ON A DIFFICULT YEAR. THEY MADE GAINS IN TERITORY AND IN CLOSING LINES OF COMMUNICATIONS, BUT THEY MADE MAJOR EFFORTS TO TAKE PHNOM PENH IN THE DECEMBER-FEBRUARY PERIOD, AND FAILED. ATTACKS ON THE ISOLATED PROVINCIAL CAPITAL ENCLAVES, IN TURN, ALSO PROVED LARGELY A FAILURE. FANK DEMONSTRATED A GROWING ABILITY OF GROUND FORCE COMMANDERS TO BRING COORDINATED ARTILLERY AND TACTICAL AIR TO BEAR ON ENEMY CONCENTRATIONS. THE ARMY LEARNED TO SHUTTLE TROOPS QUICKLY FROM TO FRONT TO MEET DEVELOPING ENEMY THREATS, AIDED BY GROWING KAF TRANSPORT CAPABILITY. NONE OF THE MAJOR ENCLAVES FELL DURING THE PAST YEAR. INSTEAD, IN RECENT MONTHS, PERIMETERS IN SOME AREAS WERE EXPANDED.

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5. IMPROVEMENTS IN RECRUITING PRACTICES ENABLE FANK MANPOWER LOSSES TO BE MADE UP TO THE POINT WHERE BY MID-1974 THE SERVICES WERE UP TO AUTHORIZED STRENGTH, UNCLASSIFIED

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WHILE LARGE NUMBERS OF "PHANTOM" SOLDIERS WERE PURGED FROM THE ROLLS. COMBA-SUSTAINED LOSSES WERE MADE GOOD. INTERVENTION UNITS, HOWEVER, ARE ALL STILL UNDER-STRENGTH AND REQUIRE INCREASED FANK EMPHASIS TO MEET REQUIRED FILL.

6. KAF OPERATES AS A TACTICAL AIR FORCE WITH T-28 JET FIGHTERS, AU-24 LIGHT GUNSHIP AIRCRAFT, AC-47 GUN PLATFORMS, AND UHIG "HUEY" HELICOPTERS, USED AS GUNSHIPS. IN THE DAYS OF U.S. AIR FORCE PARTICIPATION IN THE CAMBODIAN MILIRARY EFFORT, HIGH FLYING B-52'S AND VERY FAST F111'S AND F-4'S WERE USED EITHER FOR STRATEGIC TARGETS, OR, WHEN USED TACTICALLY, ENJOYED LITTLE GROUND LIAISON, OWING TO LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICA-TIONS DIFFICULTIES. THE KAF IS A GROUND OPERATIONS SUPPORT TYPE AIR FORCE. THE YEAR HAS SEEN GREAT PROGRESS IN PILOT TRAINING, IN MAINORYANCE CAPABILITY AND PERFORMANCE, IN RESPONSE TIMES, AND IN TEACHING GROUND COMMAN
VRBM O SUMMON AND UYC AIR ASSETS INNXVLP.974
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FCOYNFW INCREASED
EFFECTIVENESS COULD BE FOUND AS THE YEAR PROGRESSED IN MOUNTING DAILY AIR SORTIE RATES, AN INDEX WHICH MEASURES THE EFFECTIVE USE OF FORWARD AIR CONTROLLERS, AND IM-PROVING TARGET IDENTIFICATION BY ARMY UNITS. THESE DAILY SORTIE RATES ARE IMPRESSIVE.

7. KAF IS ALSO A TRANSPORT AIR FORCE, USING C-123S AND UH-1H'S FOR FERRYING TROOPS AND SUPPLIES TO A NUMBER OF ENCLAVE POSITIONS, SOME INVOLVING DIFFICULT AIR DROPS INTO SMALL PERIMETERS. ON THE WHOLE, KAF HAS PERFORMED

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EXTREMELY WELL IN ITS YEAR OF TRIAL.

8. THE KHMER NAVY, LONG CONSIDERED BY OBSERVERS TO
BE THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND ELITE OF THE THREE ARMS, HAS
ALSO MAINTAINED ITS REPUTATION DURING THE YEAR, CONTINU-
ING TO DEMONSTRATE ITS ABILITY TO KEEP THE VITAL WATER-
WAYS OPEN. NOT ONLY HAS THE MEKONG BEEN KEPT OPEN FROM
THE VIETNAM BORDER TO PHNOM PENH FOR ESSENTIAL CONVOY
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TRAFFIC, BUT THE NAVY HAS ALSO MANAGED TO OPERATE
FARTHER UP THE MEKONG FOR THE RESUPPLY OF KOMPONG CHAM,
AND REOPEN THE TONLE SAP WATERWAY FROM PHNOM PENH
TO KOMPONG CHHNANG, AND TO AGAIN PERMIT RICE AND OTHER
AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS TO REACH THE CAPITAL FROM THE
WESTERN PROVINCE OF BATTAMBANG. THE NAVY HAS ALSO BEEN
ABLE TO UNDERTAKE A REGULAR RESUPPLY EFFORT IN THE
KAMPOT AND KOMPONG SOM AREAS, THUS RELIEVING PRESSURE
ON KAF TRANSPT REQUIREMENTS.

9. SO, WHERE DO FANK FORCES STAND ONE YEJK LATER? THERE
HAVE BEEN SOME DIFFICULT TIMES OVER THE PAST TWELVE
MONTHS
AS ETHE MAJOR THREAT TO PHNOM PENH, THEN TO
KAMPOT, AND THE OTHER PROVINCIAL CAPITALS, THE SEVERING
OF PORTIONS OF ROUTES 4, 5, 6 AND 7, THE FALL OF OUDONG
AND THE GALLANT AND SUCCESSFUL RECAPTURE EFFORT, THE
INABILITY TO RELIEVE THE SMALL GARRISON OF BESIEGED
KOMPONG SEILA. BUT EACH STEP OF THE ENEMY STRATEGY
HAS BASICALLY FAILED DURING THIS TIME-FRAME. THE WATER-
WAYS REMAIN OPEN. HIGHWAY 5 REMAINS OPEN FROM KOMPONG
CHHNANG OT THE THAI BORDER. SOME ENCLAVES HAVE BEEN
EXPANDED AND THEIR PERIMETERS ENLARGED:
AROUND PHNOM PENH, AT KOMPONG THOM, AT TAKEO, AT SVAY RIENG.
REFUGEES AND RALLIERS HAVE BEEN GATHERED IN. SERIOUS
LOSSES HAVE BEEN INFLICTED ON ENEMY FORCES. FANK MAN-
POWER STRENGTH HAS BEEN MAINTAINED. AND PERHAPS MOST
OF ALL, THE FANK'S ABILITY TO STAND ON ITS OWN FEET
IN COMBAT, WITHOUT OUTSIDE AIR SUPPORT, HAS BEEN
DEMONSTRATED, TO ITSELF AND TO THE ENEMY.
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NOTE BY OC/T: PHNOM PENH 10858 SECTION 2 OF 2 TEXT GARBLED.
CORRECTION TO FOLLOW.

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